

Focused Interim Report to NWCCU

Portland State University
September 21, 2007

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NWCCU
Fall 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Recommendation Two
 - A. Institutional Assessment Council
 - B. Assessment in General Education
 - C. Assessment in Departments and Units
 - D. Pilot Testing Learning Outcomes Assessment
- III. Concluding statement on institutional progress

I. Introduction

In response to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and University's action letter of January 24, 2006, Portland State University has prepared a focused interim report that addresses Recommendation Two of the fall 2005 Comprehensive Evaluation Report. Recommendation Two noted that, while the campus had made "a serious and praiseworthy campus wide commitment to educational assessment for the long term," there were inconsistencies in implementation across units, a lack of reporting mechanisms, and the need to identify appropriate assessment measures to determine whether or not learning outcomes were being met. The specific recommendation was that the University should develop review mechanisms to ensure the implementation of assessment across the campus.

To address this recommendation, the University undertook a number of actions during 2006 and 2007 that have resulted in a more consistent and coherent statement of learning outcomes across the undergraduate curriculum and the designation of an Institutional Assessment Council as the central reporting and review mechanism for assessment on campus. Reporting of assessment plans, results, and feedback continues to be made public through the assessment website (www.programreview.pdx.edu/assessment) and the Institutional Portfolio (www.portfolio.pdx.edu). These activities are detailed in the report sections that follow. The process of reflection that resulted from Recommendation Two has allowed the University to be clearer about institutional learning outcomes and to develop mechanisms for involving all units in the kind of assessment that will lead to improvement of teaching and learning.

II. Recommendation Two

"The institution has made a serious and praiseworthy campus-wide commitment to educational assessment for the long term. Implementation has begun, and in many cases has made enough effective progress that some departments have provided clear evidence of changes and improvements. Yet, institutional progress on educational assessment is mixed and inconsistent, with some departments much further along than others. It is recommended that units continue to search for appropriate assessment measures to determine the extent to which learning objectives are met. Implementation is incomplete and uneven, lacking a review mechanism to close the feedback loop. The Committee recommends that the institution develop review mechanisms to ensure that implementation of educational assessment is effective and leads to the improvement of teaching and learning over time and across all units (Standard Two and Policy 2.2)."

A. Establishing Reporting Mechanisms and Ensuring Consistency: the Institutional Assessment Council

In order to establish a review mechanism which would monitor the implementation and effectiveness of student learning assessment, the Provost formed the Institutional Assessment Council (IAC) in the winter of 2007. The Council works to institutionalize and support sustainable assessment practices at Portland State. The committee reports directly to the Provost, and annually to the Faculty Senate.

Specifically, the Council is tasked with the following (as described in the committee charter):

1. ... promote and oversee the continued implementation of assessment across the campus, working closely with three offices: Instruction and Undergraduate Studies, Institutional Research and Planning, and the Center for Academic Excellence. The Council will assist academic departments with assessment planning and implementation that reflects student learning at the program, department, and institutional level.
2. In cooperation with the three ex-officio members, the Council will review the general charge above and design a strategy for addressing assessment long term, including a recommendation on whether the Council should be reconstituted in the future as a Faculty Senate constitutional committee. It will propose key learning goals that can be piloted for institutional assessment during 2006-07. The results from the pilot will be used as a basis for a broader campus conversation on institutional learning goals and assessment, overall. The IAC will serve as the review and reporting mechanism for assessment on campus.

The Council consists of seven voting faculty members, a graduate student representative, the Center for Academic Excellence Assessment Associate, and three ex-officio members (the Vice Provost for Instruction and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Institutional Research and Planning, and the Director of Teaching and Learning in the Center for Academic Excellence). The Council is supported by the Assessment Integration and Support Team (ASSIST), which is composed of an interdisciplinary group of graduate students with interest in assessment, the Assessment Associate from the Center for Academic Excellence, as well as the Faculty-in-Residence for Assessment who, for the 2006-2007 academic year, also chaired the IAC.

Setting Priorities to Ensure Consistency

In order to address its two charges, the Council identified the following four priorities during its inaugural year:

- First, develop a strategy for articulating and assessing campus-wide undergraduate learning outcomes.
- Second, develop a set of ethical guidelines, protocols and policies that regulate the use of student learning assessment work, (these will include, for example, how assessment information such as student evaluations is used, by whom, for what purposes; reporting and dissemination mechanisms, etc.).
- Third, develop a set of working assumptions and tenets that inform student learning assessment at Portland State (for example, valuing assessment builds a culture of evidence that supports student learning and success).
- Fourth, develop a framework that coordinates assessment efforts and recommend a set of tools that facilitate review and reporting of campus assessment work.

This framework will also include a review and feedback mechanism for the gathered assessments.

During its first six months the Council focused on the first priority, to make progress toward the development of campus-wide learning outcomes. Initially, some Council members cautioned that the IAC not be perceived by the faculty as the institutional body that is generating the student learning outcomes-- in a vacuum, by fiat, because such perception would likely jeopardize institutional buy-in. Indeed, all members felt strongly that the success of our efforts depended on the broadest possible conversation and collaboration with the campus community. The Council also did not want to “start from scratch” and begin yet another conversation on student learning outcomes; there have been several of these on this campus over the past decade and none have produced the desired outcome. Rather, the Council decided to summarize and synthesize where we are on campus with respect to the development of campus-wide learning outcomes and connect that with broader currents in undergraduate education occurring at the regional and national level. The Council felt it important to situate its current assessment work within a much larger framework of teaching and learning at Portland State.

In this work, the Council was particularly influenced by a report by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which was released in the fall of 2006. This report, *College Learning of the New Global Century: Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)*, outlines an ambitious vision for general education and proposes a set of overarching learning goals critical for preparing students for the demands of this new century. This document inspired campus leaders at this and other institutions around the country. Portland State's University Studies Council, charged with improving curricular coherence in the general education program, adopted the LEAP report as a foundational document. Moreover, in his first meeting with the IAC our Provost recommended the report as a resource for framing our approach to advancing campus-wide learning goals.

Defining Core Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

In order to connect to the work and insights of past efforts, the IAC created an omnibus document identifying commonalities and differences among the overarching learning outcomes expressed in earlier efforts on campus. In particular, the Council could draw on the UNST learning goals from 1994, the Assessment Resource Network's inductive study of 2004, draft learning outcomes created by Oregon's Joint Boards Articulation Commission (JBAC), which were released in fall 2006 in response to Senate Bill 342, and the LEAP report. For each outcome, areas of overlap and non-overlap were compared and identified. The intention was to use this summary to distill a set of common learning outcomes that reflected the combined set. This work was carried out by the ASSIST team and shared with the IAC. The Council then used this report to draft a list of outcomes and began defining each one. This process generated five learning outcomes: Ethics and Social Responsibility, Appreciation of Diversity, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Internationalization. Since these goals coincided with those of University Studies, the Council decided to maintain consistency with the naming of the University Studies outcomes. This demonstrates how these derived outcomes are not

new but have actually already taken root at the institution and reflect national and global trends in higher education.

The IAC then formed subgroups, each focusing on one outcome. The task was to tailor or make each goal unique to Portland State by developing a definition that: a) specified its core components; b) explained how it supports the unique mission of the institution; and c) suggested how it could be assessed at each of three levels: single course, programmatic and institutional. The Council also developed a sample for how the outcome might be rearticulated and assessed within a particular academic unit or program. A Sociology faculty member, who serves on the Council and plays a lead role in his department's assessment work, developed this pilot study, to help shape campus conversations as we develop the learning outcomes.

Ensuring Campus Participation and Buy-In

Next, the Council developed a process for inviting broader campus participation to further refine each outcome. The Council first shared the results of its work with the Provost, who has made the development of campus wide learning goals a key feature of his initiative around student success. To that end, the Provost has invited Carol Geary Schneider, President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and one of the lead authors the LEAP report, to be the keynote speaker at the campus' opening symposium in the fall 2007. Following her speech, the faculty will break into separate tables, each of which will have roughly eight faculty members who will focus on one learning outcome. Individually, faculty will select salient terms from a list related to the learning outcome. As a group, they will then prioritize the key terms, and use them as the basis to write a draft of a particular learning outcome, and define a term for the outcome. We will also ask, what is missing? After this, a second breakout session will ask faculty to brainstorm ideas for a Carnegie Conversation in January 2007, which will focus on how we can relate these learning outcomes to Portland State's vision. This breakout session will also ask for faculty input on the process by which university-wide learning outcomes for undergraduate education can be adopted.

After incorporating the feedback from this collaboration, the IAC will seek input from the relevant institutional committees, including the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the Academic Requirement Committee, and the Educational Policy Committee. The Council also will seek input from the academic units across campus. The intention is to have a set of common learning outcomes to propose to the Faculty Senate for adoption by the April 2008 meeting. The IAC's efforts will then shift to the other key tasks it identified, and supporting the incorporation of these learning outcomes in the departments.

B. Assessment in General Education (University Studies)

Over the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years, assessment continued to be an integral part of University Studies' approach to understanding and improving the general education experience at Portland State University. Evaluators have collected and analyzed information about the courses, the student experience in those courses, and student learning and progress on the University Studies goals. In addition to relying on

established survey instruments and assessment approaches, the assessment efforts have piloted some new assessment instruments, while connecting those efforts with larger university initiatives.

Capstone Improvement. The basis for most assessment in University Studies did not change over the last two years. Data was collected through a series of electronic and paper course evaluation surveys across the freshman, sophomore and senior levels of the program. Over the last two years productive assessment has particularly taken place with Senior Capstone, which is a culminating class designed to take students out of the classroom and into the field. For example, at the Capstone level, information from student evaluations during 2005-2006 revealed that students did not feel their course syllabi were clear about the connection of their community work to their course. In response, the Capstone program developed a checklist for Capstone syllabi, asking instructors to provide specific information to students about the community work in their course. Capstone data for the 2006-2007 academic year reveal improved student ratings of the quality of the course syllabus.

Writing Across University Studies Levels. While the primary assessment instruments remained largely unchanged over the last two years, the approach to using the assessment instruments and data has evolved and progressed. Rather than just report the data at each level in isolation, frameworks for integrating data collection and analysis across the levels of the university studies curriculum have been devised. A recent example of this was the inclusion of Junior Cluster and Senior Capstone writing samples as a part of the Freshman Inquiry portfolio review process (this will be discussed further during the section on the pilot writing assessment). In this pilot project, reviewers applied the established writing rubric to writing at multiple levels across University Studies. This review has generated information about the process of using existing rubrics across levels while creating a small set of pilot data to assist discussions concerning the implementation of student portfolios across the University Studies curriculum.

Broadening Portfolio Review. In addition to the recognized assessment instruments, pilot projects related to the Freshman Inquiry portfolio review and the Junior Cluster courses have been conducted. As noted in the self-study, Freshman Inquiry is a year-long sequence of courses that introduces students to Portland State's general education goals. Freshman Inquiry courses are interactive and theme based. All Freshman Inquiry students create an "end of the year" portfolio demonstrating what they consider to be their best work. Student portfolios are then randomly selected from each Freshman Inquiry theme and reviewed during the summer as part of a two to three day review session involving faculty and graduate students from across campus. The work is evaluated against rubrics created for each of the goals.

Freshman portfolio scores on all University Studies goals have remained stable over several years. While average portfolio scores provide program-level information for monitoring, they have not proved as useful for identifying faculty development needs. In an effort to gather more information about freshman portfolios, the Freshman Inquiry coordinator initiated the use of a checklist along with the holistic rubric currently used to score portfolios. Using the checklist, reviewers indicated the types of work included in the student portfolio. For example, while scoring student work using the writing rubric, reviewers also indicated the types of writing included in the portfolio and whether the

student used appropriate citations and grammar. The result is a more complete picture of the contents of Freshman Inquiry portfolios; this data will aid faculty teams as they work on course development for the next academic year.

Junior Cluster Learning Preferences. Another pilot survey was implemented to address the junior year of the program. A survey of students in Junior Cluster courses was conducted during the 2005-2006 academic year. Results of the survey provided some important information about student learning preferences as well as instructor approaches. Specifically, the survey reveals discrepancies between instructors' use of pedagogical approaches and the techniques that students reported most facilitated their learning. Students reported that active learning approaches such as group decision making, student presentations and collaborative projects facilitated their learning, but these techniques were not used as often as more traditional approaches such as lecturing and class discussions. This information will be used in faculty development efforts as the middle part of the University Studies program is redesigned and improved.

Connecting to University Retention Initiative. Beyond collecting and using data internally, University Studies is also broadening its approach to assessment by connecting more intentionally with larger university initiatives. The freshman Prior Learning Assessment for the last Two years has helped establish a portrait of first-generation Freshman Inquiry students that will help shape University Studies retention efforts and provide data to the larger Portland State retention initiative. This data will be used to inform decisions regarding retention efforts in University Studies. As student identifiers are added to this survey in the fall, the program as well as the university will be able to link information about students' academic preparation and pre-college experience with retention and academic performance information.

Finally, in spring 2006 the Faculty Senate created a new body, the University Studies Council, which is charged with evaluating and rethinking general education at Portland State University. One of the areas of interest for the Council is the assessment of this program. The Council has only begun its work in this area, but one of its initial recommendations has been data compression for the information generated in University Studies. While the Council commended UNST's assessment, it believed that the quantity of information could at times be so large as to make analysis difficult. This information will need to shape future decisions about presenting assessment data. In fall of 2007, UNST hired a new assessment coordinator whose position is housed in the Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

C. Assessment in Departments and Units **The Assessment Integration and Support Team (ASSIST)**

The Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) at Portland State University has assessment as one of its key missions. To this end, the ASSIST team of graduate students has worked with departments to help create a culture of assessment. The team made enormous progress over the last few years, encouraged in part by the accreditation process. It also gained additional support with the creation of a "Faculty-in-Residence for Assessment" position in the fall of 2006. This faculty member received a reduced teaching load in return for a year-long commitment to work with CAE's assessment associate, as well as the ASSIST team, to encourage assessment across campus. In

addition, one faculty member from College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) received a course release for two terms on a one-time basis to help foster the conversation around assessment in CLAS in winter and spring of 2007

The goal of these appointments was to encourage consistency and clarity in assessment. In addition, the ASSIST team has worked hard to foster more complete and systematic assessment across campus. Since fall 2005, the ASSIST team has spent a great deal of time in discussions with units considering the following: What does engagement look like in terms of student learning at Portland State, including but also beyond the concept of community-based learning? How do students engage with the learning process itself and with their own education? How do we tell the story of student learning on our campus?

There is a rich array of answers to these questions as assessment planning manifests in academic units in discipline-specific ways. The chemistry department is building on previous assessment projects that use lab reports for journaling and as writing samples. The English department uses pre/post writing samples to better understand how students learn to engage in close reading and critical analysis. Assessment research in the Mathematics Department this year focused on how math proficiency contributes to writing proficiency. The College of Urban and Public Affairs is systematizing their approach to assessment to allow each division and program to conduct activities specific to their field, while using tools and processes that tell the story of student learning overall.

On a practical or logistical note, many units have an annual or semi-annual assessment process in place that is working well. Examples in undergraduate education include Anthropology's course portfolio assessment, the Center for Science Education's pre/post scientific research review work sample assessment, Engineering's focused email discussions and student portfolio review, and Graphic Design and Architecture's portfolio assessment. Examples in graduate education include the Graduate School of Education's field experience assessment, work sample assessment, personal statement assessment, and self-evaluation on Admission, Mid-point, Completion and Follow-up; and the School of Social Work's exit surveys and mid-program evaluations. The Bilingual Teacher Pathways program, in particular, has been intensively assessed by multiple means.

A number of units have recently begun to design a process with an integrated approach, sustainability, and engagement in mind. Some of these new programs, such as Native American Studies, have begun working on their learning outcomes, program objectives, and curriculum mapping (utilizing a faculty survey) in an effort to identify correlations and differences between the learning outcomes of the program and individual courses.

During the past year, the ASSIST met with every school or college and with most of the individual academic units. In CLAS, the largest college at Portland State, the associate dean organized a series of round table discussions with the departmental chairs. At these meetings, each chair talked about the process, needs, frustrations, and intentions of their unit, as well as what their department was learning from its assessment practices. ASSIST then met with most of the CLAS departments to further support them in conducting one full assessment cycle for this year. In addition, the Vice-Provost for Instruction discussed assessment at the Assistant and Associate Deans meeting, as well as

the Council of Academic Deans meeting. Through this process of consultation, it became clear that departments wanted more guidance about what they were to assess. This feedback helped to make the development of undergraduate learning outcomes a priority at Portland State.

The ASSIST team then supported the Institutional Assessment Council as it worked to develop undergraduate learning outcomes. The ASSIST team conducted an initial comparative review, analysis, and synthesis of several documents that proposed university-wide learning outcomes, which the IAC then used to draft learning outcomes for Portland State. In addition, the team also conducted an extensive search of possible data management systems in an effort to provide the campus with a system that will encourage the assessment process, and the effective use of feedback. ASSIST believes that an efficient, easy-to-use reporting structure that makes sense locally and institutionally will be essential to the success of long term assessment.

D. Pilot Testing Learning Outcomes Assessment: International Learning and Writing

In addition to the work in the units, Portland State decided to focus on two learning outcomes that are so central to the University's experience that they are almost certain to remain in any adoption of university-wide undergraduate learning outcomes: international learning and writing.

International learning—Internationalization began as a presidential initiative, and is now institutionalized on our campus. In the fall of 2003, the American Council on Education (ACE) received a preparatory grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to develop a three-year project to assess international learning. ACE selected six institutional partners from the Internationalization Collaborative¹ to form a working group for this project. These original participants articulated a set of international learning goals involving the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and two assessment tools, including a demographic survey instrument and student-generated portfolios, to measure student progress toward those goals in a series of coordinated trials across the six campuses. Portland State was invited to participate halfway through the project when one of the original participants withdrew, and welcomed the opportunity to do so, in large part because the project dovetailed neatly with assessment and curriculum development efforts already underway in various parts of the University.

Portland State focused its assessment efforts on the University's general education program. The institutional project team, which included Associate Dean Duncan Carter of CLAS, Vice Provost of International Affairs Gil Latz and Associate Professor Patricia M. Thornton, selected four courses from the University Studies Program for testing: one Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) course, one Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) course, and two Upper-Division Cluster courses. The first round of assessment, completed in March 2007, involved thirty-five students enrolled in one section of the FRINQ course "On

¹ The original six institutions included Dickinson College (PA), James Madison University (VA), Kalamazoo College (MI), Kapi'olani Community College (HI), Michigan State University (MI), and Palo Alto College (TX).

Democracy,” and twenty-six students in the “Introduction to Asian Studies” SINQ course. The second round, completed in June 2007, added another forty students enrolled in two Upper-Division Cluster courses in Asian Studies, “Special Topics in Contemporary Asia” and “Geography of Japan.” One hundred and one student-designed portfolios of four to seven items each were collected and evaluated by teams of trained raters on a four-point scale (inadequate, minimal, moderate and extensive) with respect to the forty specific learning outcomes developed by the ACE working group.

With the data collection effort now complete, the Portland State project team has only just begun the process of evaluating the results. However, preliminary analysis suggests some general trends that will surely prove significant in assessing international learning outcomes at Portland State. First, the data clearly demonstrate a general upward trend in the attainment of learning goals as students move through the general education program, with the portfolios of students in the upper-division courses scoring higher on nearly every outcome than those produced by students enrolled at the first-year level. Interestingly, this trend is least consistent with respect to the skills outcomes, with some of the SINQ student portfolios demonstrating higher skills ratings than those produced by upper-division students. Second, it also appears that the greatest gains in international learning outcomes occur after the sophomore year, with the scoring of FRINQ and SINQ portfolios virtually indistinguishable from each other, but both rather different from the upper-division cluster portfolios, which were notably higher on virtually all outcomes. Third, and finally, the data on certain specific learning outcomes are notably lower across all three levels of students: student knowledge of global issues, processes, trends and systems; appreciation of philosophical and religious perspectives, and differences in material culture; and high levels of awareness of biases, prejudices and stereotypes. The next step in institutionalizing the assessment process at Portland State will involve disseminating the data to faculty in both the International Studies and University Studies programs, and initiating a series of conversations about the utility of this particular set of learning outcomes and rubrics. The institution hopes learn from this project how to build coherence into international studies and enhance integration across the general education program.

Writing—Portland State also pilot tested an assessment around writing, another key university learning outcome. An analysis of the assessment data base confirmed that writing is a commonly assessed learning outcome among institutional departments and the University Studies general education program. It is reflected, too, in the Institutional Assessment Council’s draft institutional learning outcomes, providing a logical place to begin examination of the intersection of learning in general education with the majors or disciplines. To do this, a pilot project for assessment of writing in the junior year was developed, combining techniques already in use in University Studies and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences’ Writing Intensive Courses (WIC). This combined assessment included student and faculty surveys and an authentic assessment of student work samples using the University Studies’ Writing Rubric. The project involved faculty from the Writing Program and University Studies, the university’s Faculty-in-Residence for Assessment, and the Director of Institutional Research and Planning.

To begin, CLAS and the University Studies Program identified up to ten faculty members who could volunteer their spring term 2007 classes for the project. These faculty members received a short web survey that asked them to categorize the types of

writing assigned in their courses, so that common assignments could be identified for assessment using the writing rubric. Faculty asked students to submit writing samples voluntarily. The rubric assessment consisted of a blind review by trained portfolio/rubric assessment teams under the direction of University Studies. At the same time, faculty and students received the WIC survey, which was completed in class. The survey collected information on faculty and student experiences with writing at Portland State. By combining self-reported data with assessment of work samples, we hope to begin to develop an understanding of student gains in writing across the curriculum that could help in implementing and institutionalizing the core learning outcomes developed by the IAC.

During summer 2007, survey results were linked to the results of the writing sample assessment. Aggregate results from the surveys and writing assessments will be used to inform the university's assessment of writing at the junior level. A second administration of the pilot project will be conducted in winter 2008. In addition to this project, we have plans to participate in ACT's pilot writing and critical thinking assessments during October 2007, using the standardized CAAP test.

III. Conclusion

Recommendation Two called on Portland State University to create a review mechanism for assessment to close the feedback loop, and to ensure consistency. As a result of this request, we have created the Institutional Assessment Council. During conversations with deans and department chairs it also became clear that we needed to have university-wide learning outcomes for undergraduate education in order to achieve clarity in our assessment efforts. We have begun a process to define these outcomes, which we plan to take to Faculty Senate in April 2008.

This effort matches with a larger effort to define a strategic vision for Portland State led by Provost Koch. As part of this effort, the university has staked its leadership position around engagement, which is supported by three key priorities: student success (including the development of student learning outcomes), innovative scholarship, and educational opportunity. As we move forward with developing our undergraduate learning outcomes, we will customize them to reflect our university's vision, which should also encourage clarity and consistency.

We have also continued innovative assessment efforts in University Studies, at all levels of the program, from Freshman Inquiry to the Senior Capstone. Over the coming three years, we intend to significantly expand our use of e-portfolios throughout the program, which will facilitate assessment throughout general education. We have also worked to close the feedback loop within UNST. Given the new commitment to student success at PSU, we are placing particular emphasis on using our data to improve both persistence and success through our general education program. This will be an on-going focus for UNST.

The ASSIST team has also held discussions about assessment across campus, to create a common campus culture of assessment. We have created new resources to support the work in the departments, in particular the faculty-in-residence for assessment, who works closely with the ASSIST team. Our goal with this is to ensure greater

consistency regarding assessment at Portland State, in accord with Recommendation Two.

Finally, we have piloted learning outcomes assessment for two key themes, international learning and writing. As we move towards university-wide learning outcomes, this trial allows us to examine how we might implement these, and work to create an evidence-based approach to instruction at Portland State.